

*Searching for Masculinity in a  
world of contradictions*

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*The example of primary schools in Germany*

*Christoph Fantini, University of Bremen*

*(all translations of german references by the author, CF)*

## *Historical claims for Superiority*

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- „ *The Women do, without any doubt, not belong to the academic fields of lecturing and studying...*“ (J. G. Herder 1744-1803, in: Ballauff, 1969-73, II. volume: 426)

## *Recent expectations of subordination*

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- *„What do you think, what might be the reason, why there are so much more women as teachers in primary schools than men?“*
- *„Because women are simply smarter than men!“*

*(from interviews with primary school children, Hentrop, Bremen 2013)*

## *Basic assumptions about masculinity in contradictions I.*

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- *M. Meuser (2005:11): The contradictory modernisation of masculinities:*
- *„Masculinity loses more and more its traditional, institutionalized spaces and consequently the character of the selfunderstood. Men have to find out for themselves how they get along with their masculinity, because it is no longer institutionally granted and no longer a selfunderstood part of gender dynamics. Masculinity became a challenge instead of a guarantee.“*

## *Basics II.: Masculinity in gender relationships*

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*A. Kerschgens (2010): The contradictory changes in the gender dynamics.*

- *Contradiction I.: between emancipation and market integration: there is a conflict between emancipated attitudes and the orientation of efficiency for the market*
- *Contradiction II.: Old ways and new ways exist simultaneously: there is no linear development towards the new models of the society concerning gender dynamics, self concepts and praxis.*

*Drafts of masculinity, Primary school artists draw teachers and TV  
idols (with and without male teachers, following slices male/female)*

(Bunte/Schäfer) 2013 u. Schäfer, Fangmann 2015)



Male  
Lieblingsfigur.

deine

männliche

Male deine weibliche Lieblingsfigur.



Habe  
keine

Male deine

männliche

Male deine weibliche Lieblingsfigur.

Lieblingsfigur.

Frederico (Fedel)

Ich kann sie  
nicht lieben,  
weil es  
Menschen sind

Francesco (Fran)



Male  
Lieblingsfigur.

deine

männliche

Male deine weibliche Lieblingsfigur.



→ Kesselschwert

Male

deine

männliche

Male deine weibliche Lieblingsfigur.

Lieblingsfigur.

Chris

S. Jella



# *Negative male identity*

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- *Böhnisch (1994: 64f.): Finding masculinity in drawing borders to everything female.*
- *The boy finds his gender identity by trying to be not like the „not-man“ role model in his surroundings (mother, nurse in child care, primary school teacher etc.). The result is a „negative identity“. This process is strengthened by the lack of male role models.*

# Constructions and physical categories

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- „The constructivist discourse, which is important for the reflexive discourse in the pedagogics, is bound to be stuck in inefficiency concerning pedagogical work itself – for example the claim for dedramatizing gender – if the real inner feelings of male students are in the focus, which can't be simply deconstructed from their physical reality.“ (Böhnisch 2015: 11)

# Constructions and physical categories II.

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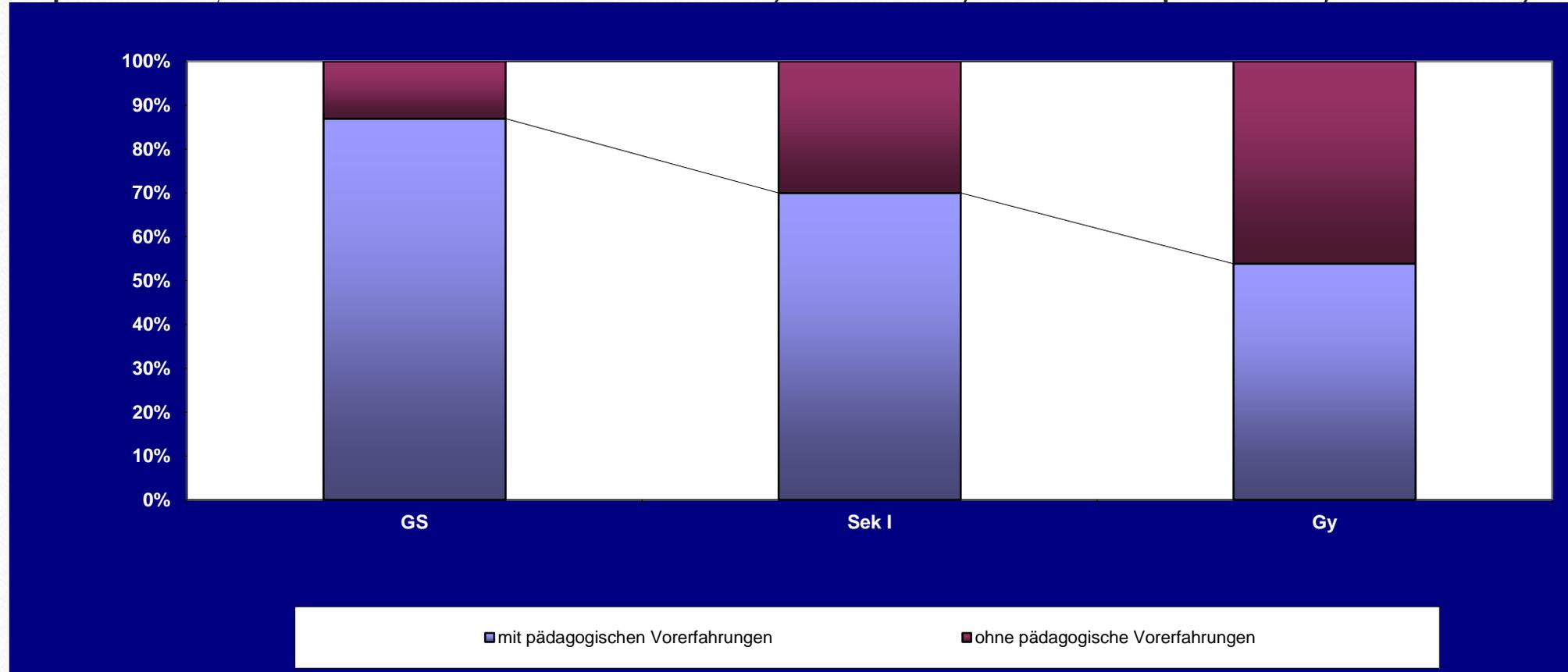
- „... the difference between men and women is cultural, not the feature to be a man or a woman.“ (Luhmann 1988: 50)

# *Negotiating masculinities in primary schools*

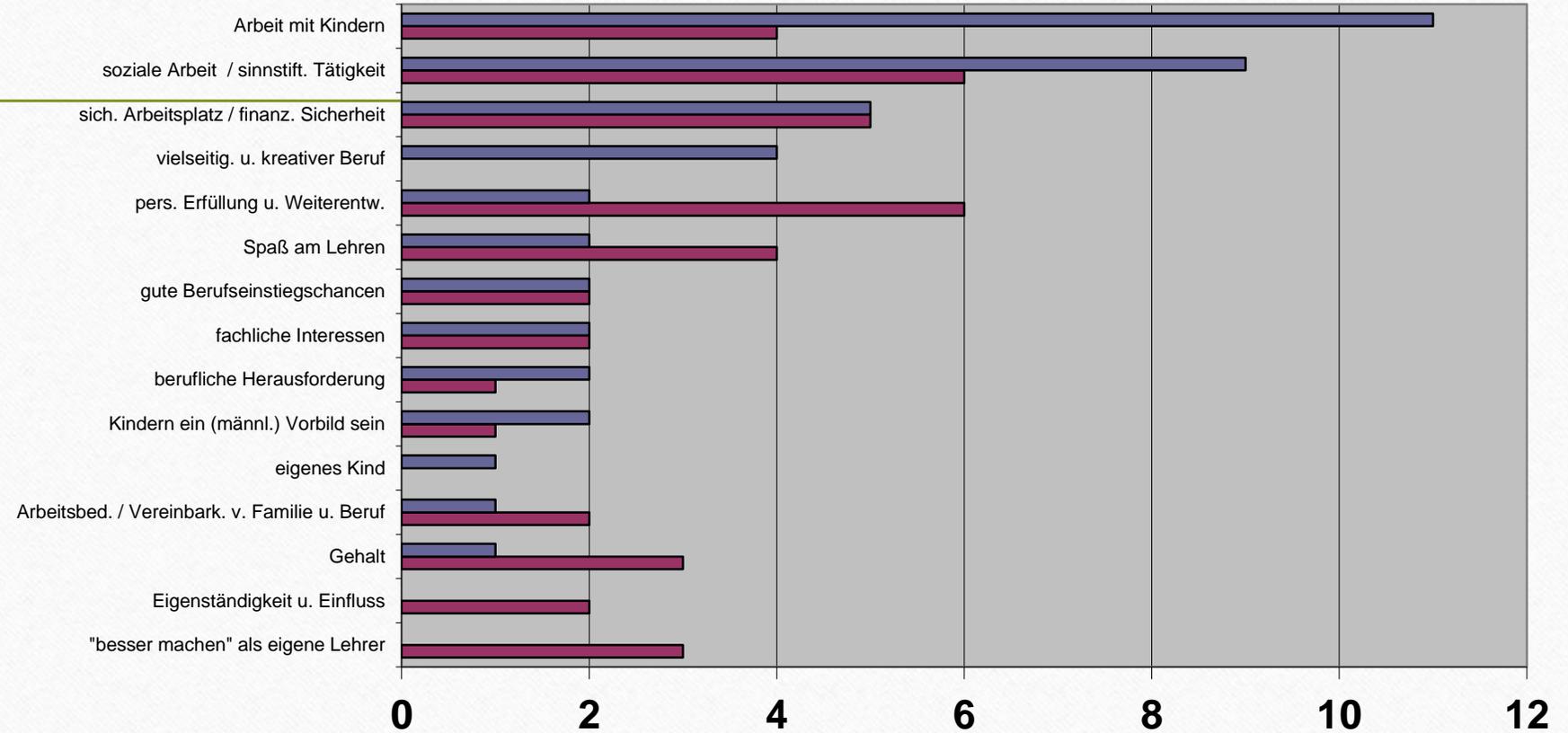
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- *„What would you say, what is masculin for you?“*
- *„I don't know... A man is masculin...“*
- *„OK, no problem. and what would you say could be something which is typical for a man?“*
- *Well, something like boxing and dancing, and being a teacher! Because you are also a teacher!“*
- *(Soner Uygun 2016: 124; Interview with primary school boy in MA-Thesis)*

*Which role models?* (Experiences before the decision to become a primary school teacher student; Fantini/Hentrop 2011, N = 46)



## *Which role models II.?* Motivation to become a primary school teacher student (ebd.)



*Which role models III.? (Attitudes towards studying at the university, Fantini/Hentrop 2011, N = 85)*

**Relevanz des Studiums in Bezug auf andere Lebensbereiche (1 hoch/trifft zu – 6 niedrig/trifft nicht zu)**

**W: 2,29                      M: 2,55**

**Relevanz von Noten für ihr Studium**

**W: 2,25                      M: 3,45**

**Zufriedenheit mit eigenen Leistungen**

**W:2,57                      M: 2,95**

## *Which role models IV. (from group interviews with male teacher students, 2010)*

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- I know exactly what you are talking of [to the question about extremely cool, sometimes negligent attitudes of male students, CF], and I feel addressed with this myself. Starting from primary school I realized in my surroundings that I can not compete with the girls concerning the academic performance. But I didn't want to be looked upon as the loser, or something like this. So I tried to collect points with showing coolness and being sportive, and somehow I had the feeling that this strategy was working ok and so it became something like a pattern...“*

## *Summarizing contradictions*

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- *feelings of subordination and negative identities vs. „playing cool“*
- *lack of feeling well and secure vs. attribution of exaggerated selfconsciousness (Bos 2005)*
- *no adult male partner to talk to vs. attribution of missing communicative competence (Fantini 2012)*
- *high need for „men who care“ and at the same time progressing exodus of men from all care professions (Faulstich-Wieland 2012, Fantini 2012)*

## *Intersectional perspectives*

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- *adolescent boys from underprivileged, often migrant homes give low value to school performance („nothing for real men“) but at the same time want to become a good „breadwinner“*

(A. Sudy 2013: „How masculin are good results at school?“)

- *these boys try to compensate for the humiliation of their fathers (low income, loss of authority and self-esteem) with either aggression or exaggerated ambitions*

(V. King 2009: 49f.)

# Read more?

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- [www.maenner-in-die-grundschule.de](http://www.maenner-in-die-grundschule.de)